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ABSTRACT

As the writing instructors at Georgian Court College, Lakewood, New Jersey (a four-year, Catholic, liberal arts college), moved from the classroom to the computer lab, new classroom dynamics resulted in positive changes and challenges in both teaching and learning. The writing center is located in a newly renovated building and includes 15 computers and 5 printers. The writing center and the academic units of the college adopted WordPerfect as the standard word processing program. Writing instructors use the computers to present and review concepts and for responding to student writing, using the "document comment" feature of WordPerfect. Students use the computer as a tool for generating ideas and organizing their thoughts. Electronic mail shows great potential for teaching and learning, especially in a writing course. A majority of students' comments on the use of computers in the writing class were related to the ease of revision. Classroom dynamics changed as students gradually shifted away from the mechanics (asking for help with computers and software applications) and towards content as they began to ask peers and instructors to read the text on the screen and make suggestions. The atmosphere of the computer lab encourages collaboration and allows the instructor to become a facilitator rather than a lecturer. (RS)

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# A Different Dynamic: The Changing Role of the Teacher in the Writing Classroom

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# A Different Dynamic: The Changing Role of the Teacher in the Writing Classroom

**A joint presentation by**

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In the traditional settings, instructors frequently dominate the dynamic of classroom interaction. In many contemporary writing classrooms, however, the role of teachers/professors is being modified to meet the new dynamics created by the introduction of computers. As the writing instructors at Georgian Court College moved from classroom to computer lab, these new dynamics have resulted in many positive changes and challenges in both teaching and learning. These new challenges, which both high schools and colleges must face, include necessary revisions in traditional writing syllabi, in classroom time spent initially teaching computer technology, in scheduling in-class use of computers, in implementing collaborative learning methods, and in designing helpful classroom teaching techniques for both new and experienced writing instructors. These new dynamics have resulted in positive changes including increased interaction among students and among students and instructors. We will also offer suggestions concerning design of a computer lab which supports collaborative learning and in-service training for faculty.

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To appreciate some of the changes which have taken place as a result of the establishment of the computer lab at Georgian Court, it may help to know a little about the campus and the evolution of this computer lab.

Georgian Court College is a four-year, Catholic, liberal arts college, with a women's undergraduate day division, a co-ed undergraduate evening division and a co-ed graduate division. Total enrollment is about 2000 students. The college is located in Lakewood, NJ, about one hour north of Atlantic City, an hour and a half south of New York City.

The campus, originally the estate of George Jay Gould, a turn-of-the-century railroad tycoon, was purchased by the Sisters of Mercy in 1924. The original buildings are in the National Registry of Historic Places, and the campus itself is designated a

National Landmark. So the intrusion of technology upon this historic site is an interesting phenomenon to observe and experience.

Until 1988, the college had only one academic computer lab, used primarily by the math and business departments. During the summer of 1988, the Dean of Academic Affairs asked one of the English faculty to research hardware and software necessary for a second computer lab, which would serve writing courses primarily.

Renovation of one of the original buildings, originally part of the Gould stables, began that summer: new electricity, central air conditioning and heating, flooring, drop ceiling, fire and security system were all installed. The building was named Raymond Hall Computer Center, and the Writing Center is located there.

The Writing Center houses fifteen IBM PS/2 Model 30 computers, networked to a Model 80 server, three Epson dot matrix printers, and two Hewlett-Packard laser printers. We received a NOVELL Education Grant for NOVELL SFT Netware, version 2.15. With this we installed IBM's I-CLAS to make NOVELL more user-friendly.

After much deliberation, WordPerfect 5.0 was selected as the standard word processing program for the writing courses. We have upgraded this year to the 5.1 version. The academic units of the college have adopted this program as the standard as we move toward networking the whole campus. So far, students have found this program relatively easy to use, especially with in-house manuals. WordPerfect offers a comprehensive selection of features which we will appreciate as we become more familiar with the program.

In the freshman writing courses, instructors use the computers as effective teaching tools for presenting and reviewing concepts and for responding to student writing. They also see the computers as effective tools for students to generate ideas and revise text.

Some writing instructors are using the computer as a tool for teaching, practice, response, and revision in College Prose Composition, the freshman writing course.

Some faculty use the computer to present or review concepts when their class is in the lab. Faculty encourage students to write to learn; the computer aids in integrating that technique easily. Another benefit of using the computers to present and review concepts occurs early in a semester: these activities give students practice using the computer in a non-threatening, controlled way. Faculty sometimes have students work in pairs, to eliminate some "technical trauma" and also to encourage collaborative learning. Unlike their experience with dittos, students can practice and receive immediate feedback from the instructor. Students can correct/revise on screen and print out a clean copy for future reference.

Some faculty have also begun to use the computer to respond to students' writing. One of the features of WordPerfect 5.1 is "Document Comment," which allows an instructor to insert a boxed comment in a student's text. When the student retrieves her essay, she sees these boxes interspersed through the text. She can revise immediately and delete each comment or turn all comments into text and print out for revision at another time. Students who are still

not comfortable with "on-line" writing prefer the latter.

We surveyed one class in which this technique was piloted and received some interesting feedback:

* I think the handwritten comments were much more helpful. There were no comments on grammar, and that is my problem.
* I liked the old way of giving comments ... When you write directly on our essays it's easy to tell exactly where we need correction.
* I liked the idea of using the computer to evaluate ... It was very clear to read. The suggestions were in the text right after the area which needed work...
* I enjoyed getting my corrections on disk. Sometimes seeing red on my essay for the third revision make me feel full of anxiety. This was much better.
* I think that the comments are neat; however, I prefer reading your comments on paper - my eyes don't adjust to looking at a computer screen for a long time. But since we were able to print out the comments within the essay, reading they along with my [paper] was easier.

The first few comments exemplify what we know from research conducted by Mina Shaughnessy and others: students may find surface errors easier to correct, so they look for those comments, often ignoring substantive changes. The purpose of the course, however, is to provide a scaffold of good writing by using teacher

feedback, and to encourage students to construct their own scaffold, gradually removing the teacher's.

Students use the computer as a tool for generating ideas. Two programs available for that purpose, Writer's Helper and SEEN, both from CONDUIT. Writer's Helper contains prewriting and organizing activities which help students generate ideas and organize them. For example, audience is a particularly difficult concept for beginning writers, so early in the semester, instructors introduce an activity which helps students think about their identified audience. The questions focus students on writing for a particular audience and also help students begin to generate ideas for their essays. After students have written a draft, they can use the Revision activities in Writer's Helper to evaluate organization of ideas, as well as sentence structure and word choice.

In the second part of the course of the freshman writing, students use a containing a number of readings upon they base their essays. Some instructors have started to use the SEEN program to help students generate ideas and organize their thoughts as they do these readings. SEEN is a series of guided reading tutorials which can easily be adapted for writing and literature-based assignments. The questions in the "Essay Analysis" activity, for example, allow students to transfer the knowledge they gained from analyzing a model essay to their own writing, and, subsequently, into an understanding of elements of literature.

After students respond to the questions, they can post their work on a bulletin board which is part of the program. Other

students can then retrieve those responses, read them, and add their own comments. The original student then has not only her ideas, but those of others, including the instructor.

This basic concept of "electronic mail" is a feature of networked computers that has great potential for teaching and learning, especially in a writing course! Instructors can send and receive information to and from students, setting up an "on-line" dialogue. In the near future, we will purchase or develop a program which allows for "real-time" interaction, so students and instructor can dialogue in or out of class. The possibilities are exciting, certainly not replacing human interaction, but adding another dimension to communication and collaboration.

The most popular feature of computers in a writing class is probably the ease of revision. A few writing classes were selected to share what they like about computers, and the majority of responses related to revision. Here are a few comments:

* I notice my mistakes more easily. I feel I have become a better writer.
* My writing has improved. I've never really revised essays as many times as I do now. The computer makes it a lot easier.
* My writing has become more spontaneous and confident. Also, it's become "tighter" because of my ability to move around and make changes that create more fluency in my work.

Instructors are also using Writer's Helper to introduce literary style. For example, students can analyze various aspects of a particular authors's writing style and then try to model their own writing after that.

An interesting side benefit of integrating the computers is the change in classroom dynamics, including student-to-student interaction and collaboration. Initially students ask instructors or peers for help with the computers and the software applications, but about two or three weeks into the semester, the interaction shifts away from the mechanics and towards the content as they begin to ask peers and instructors to read the text on their screens and make suggestions. The atmosphere of the lab encourages collaboration and allows the instructor to become a facilitator rather than a lecturer.

The most difficult part of establishing this computer lab was moving from paper plans into action. As we continue to grow, we are acutely aware of the changes occurring. These changes are exciting and challenging for both faculty and students.